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NSC FOR JELLISON AND LHAYDEN

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KN](#) [KS](#) [CH](#) [RS](#)  
SUBJECT: TURNING RUSSIA INTO A MORE HELPFUL SIX PARTY  
PARTNER

REF: 08 MOSCOW 3130

Classified By: CDA Eric Rubin for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Russian Six Party negotiator Grigoriy Logvinov is pressing for closer coordination with the new Administration. Early consultations, in Washington or Moscow (on the margins of the February 19-20 NEAPSM Working Group meeting), could potentially turn the GOR into a more helpful Six Party partner. Russian bilateral relations with North Korea are characterized by a 60-year-long friendship but also by declining influence. Despite Russian commitment to the Six Party process and access to North Korean views on de-nuclearization issues, Moscow is resentful of being left on the margins while the U.S. negotiates bilaterally with North Korea, and has not played a particularly effective role in helping to induce positive DPRK behavior. In a recent meeting with us, Ambassador Logvinov downplayed North Korean intransigence on sampling and pressed for the completion of the second phase of the talks as soon as possible. Early and sustained engagement may help resolve apparent disconnects with Russia over what constitutes completion of the second phase and the modalities for verification. End Summary.

#### A Complicated Bilateral Relationship

¶2. (C) Present day Russian relations with North Korea are complicated and delicate. On the one hand, the GOR has maintained its historic friendship with the DPRK despite the former's repudiation of the communist system. President Medvedev sent a congratulatory message to Kim Jong-Il upon the 60th anniversary of the founding of the DPRK last year. The October 2008 visit of North Korean Foreign Minister Pak Ui Chun to Moscow generated much positive press on bilateral relations between the two countries, and work is underway for a reciprocal visit by Foreign Minister Lavrov to Pyongyang sometime in 2009. Russian officials are acutely aware that for better or worse, North Korea is a neighbor with whom Moscow should maintain good relations; one whose potential instability could have dire spill-over effects across the border.

¶3. (C) On the other hand, Russian influence over the North Korean government has declined since the fall of the Soviet Union. A brief attempt in the late 1990s to strengthen bilateral ties ended in DPRK backtracking on promises made to then President Putin, and the GOR has not made further meaningful attempts to regain influence since then. To the extent that any outside government can influence the North Korean leadership, Russian experts on the DPRK all point to China as having more sway. Despite the one hundred

thousand-strong Russian-Korean community in its Far East regions, Moscow is too far away and too preoccupied with more pressing issues in the former Soviet space to maintain a sustained focus on North Korea.

Committed to the Six Party Talks...

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14. (C) For the small number of Russian MFA officials dealing with North Korean issues, the tendency for the United States and North Korea to engage in direct bilateral negotiations within the Six Party framework is a source of chagrin, as it reinforces the perception that Russia is now a less important player on the Korean Peninsula.

15. (C) Nevertheless, the GOR is committed to the Six Party Talks, viewing it as part of its global nuclear non-proliferation policy and the best way to ensure a non-nuclear armed North Korea, a goal that is as important to Russia as it is to the U.S. The GOR as of January 10 delivered its last shipment of heavy fuel oil to North Korea, completing its assistance obligations ahead of schedule thanks to state oil company Rosneft's working through the January 1-9 new year holidays. As chair of the Fifth Working Group on the creation of a Northeast Asia Peace and Security Mechanism (NEAPSM), the GOR has been consolidating Six Party partners' comments on a draft principles document and has proposed holding the next working group meeting in Moscow February 19-20. The Russian Ambassador-at-Large for Six Party Talks Grigoriy Logvinov told us during a January 15 meeting that the MFA was eagerly awaiting USG confirmation of attendance, while understanding the scheduling challenges

associated with our transition; all other partners except Japan have accepted the dates.

16. (C) Russian officials also recognize that the U.S. is the only Six Party partner that could offer what the DPRK really wants -- eventual normalization of diplomatic relations, which they hope would make the North feel more secure about its regime survival and lead to more policy space to enact economic reforms. They are therefore supportive of bilateral contacts between the U.S. and North Korea in this regard, while simultaneously grumbling about being left on the margins.

But More of a Channel for North Korean Views

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17. (C) This duality between rational understanding of the big picture and frustration at its own inability to play a more central role is hindering Moscow's potential as a more effective Six Party partner. The GOR is a channel through which the North Koreans voice their concerns, as was the case during FM Pak's October visit, when he gave the MFA a preview of North Korean intentions to adopt a tough stance and back away from a number of understandings reached in the October U.S.-DPRK bilateral agreement (Reftel). The MFA has periodically passed to us such North Korean views, sometimes with a touch of smugness that the USG does not appear to have a monopoly on information, but always with an entreaty for closer consultations. A constant refrain from our Russian interlocutors is the unhappiness over having the results of bilateral negotiations thrust upon them as a fait accompli. While MFA officials assure us of their continued commitment to be helpful in the Six Party process, Moscow has stopped short of expending capital in persuading the North Koreans to fulfill their commitments.

18. (C) Rather, despite the lack of a signed verification protocol, the MFA is eager to declare the second phase of the Six Party Talks complete once North Korea finishes disabling the Yongbyon nuclear facilities. Logvinov, in particular, excuses North Korean resistance to having samples taken outside the country for analysis as a matter of procedure--that the DPRK is only saying no to sampling during the second phase, when its obligations extend to disablement but not verification. In contrast to the more cautious

approach of the United States, South Korea, and Japan, the Russians appear to favor bringing the second phase to a close as soon as possible, including the economic assistance commitments, and pushing the verification issues to the third phase and onto the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

#### Need for Consultations

19. (C) As the transition in Washington gets underway and the GOR voices its hopes for better cooperation between our two governments, we have an opportunity to influence Russian behavior within the Six Party framework. Ambassador Logvinov is eager to consult with the new team in the Department and has already received MFA permission to travel to Washington at a time convenient to us. An early visit by the new EAP Assistant Secretary to Six Party countries, including Russia, would also be helpful in this regard, as well as high-level attendance of the proposed February 19-20 NEAPSM working group meeting. In particular, consultations should address the two areas where Russian policy may run counter to ours--the Russian wish to declare the second phase complete and successful despite the lack of a signed verification protocol; and the preference that the IAEA conduct the verifications according to the IAEA standards and criteria. EAP A/S Hill's May 2008 visit to Moscow generated significant good will in our bilateral relationship, and reinforcing patterns of dialogue with the GOR will help us refocus our efforts on a more positive agenda. Sustained engagement with GOR on the Six Party Talks has the potential to turn Moscow from a marginal player with inclinations to serve as a North Korean mouthpiece to a more useful partner who could utilize its ties with the DPRK to help induce positive behavior from the North.

RUBIN